

## 4. The "Mystery Ship" Apollo

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"The Apollo has shuttled between Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao like a circus train, carrying entertainers, musicians, theatre groups, etc., who also double as crew on deck, watch and kitchen duties."

- U.S. State Dept. Memorandum

By the late 60s, the Government's secret war against Scientology had expanded to international dimensions, involving the CIA; the overseas arm of the Drug Enforcement Administration (then BNDD); U. S. embassies and diplomatic outposts; and "friendly" foreign intelligence agencies.

Attention was focused principally upon the 3,280-ton motor vessel, the Apollo, operated by the church as a training ship for management personnel. It also provided L. Ron Hubbard, the church founder, with a place to conduct various kinds of research free of constant raids and intrusions by minions of the federal Government.

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During the entire ten years that the Apollo sailed the high seas, no proof was ever obtained by the legion of international spies monitoring her that the ship or its crew or passengers ever did anything illegal.

A CIA memorandum reports that there was no indication that the ship's activities posed any intelligence or security risk.

The Defense Investigative Service, whose spooks were also keeping a close watch on the Apollo and its complement, likewise found nothing, on close inspection, to complain of. One of the communications in their files observes:

"It is understood this vessel has an unusual crew who appear to be considerably more refined and well-behaved than what would normally be expected. Also this ship has been reported to have an entertainment troupe on board."

Rodney Austin, the legal expert on civil liberties and constitutional law, voiced the opinion that there were four reasons for surveillance of the ship and infiltration of its crew, namely: (1) it was part of an IRS-U. S. Customs joint intelligence scheme; (2) the privacy insisted upon by the ship; (3) the absence of a recognisable commercial purpose; and (4) the entrenched animus of the Government, bent on "getting" the church.

The world press weighed in with their customary lurid and inaccurate reporting, dubbing the Apollo a "mystery ship" and implying that strange things were happening aboard the vessel.

The truth was that in every port where she docked, both passengers and crew of the Apollo enjoyed open and cordial relations with the people of their host country. The substantial amount of money they spent with local merchants was a welcome boost to the economy of the small Mediterranean ports. Scientology artists and musicians from the ship gave free concerts and entertainment.

But if the people of the host countries enjoyed the fun and fellowship with the young Scientologists, the U. S. Navy took a different view. In an interview with a Swedish journalist,

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one Captain Lemon, Naval attache at the American Embassy in Athens, told the reporter that the Apollo was operated by a "vague, silent and sinister organization," the activities of which were unknown. He suspected that dangerous drugs, especially marijuana were in circulation aboard ship, and stated that he had counselled U.S. naval personnel on liberty not to "get mixed up with trouble."

Captain Lemon vouchsafed the opinion that it was highly likely that U.S. Army deserters may have taken refuge on the ship in an attempt to escape foreign military service.

The naval officer denied that he had given a direct order forbidding Naval personnel to pay courtesy visits to the Apollo, but admitted that he had "strongly advised" such a prohibition to the Captains of U.S. Naval vessels in the area.

The Swedish journalist, Bjorn Johnsson, summed up the situation in these words:

"Looking back on the interview, I recall that Captain Lemon seemed unduly nervous when informing me of the rumors, and I have a distinct impression that he knew the information he gave to me was false and without basis in fact. It is my opinion that he had been ordered to so misinform journalists."

The Apollo did not encounter any difficulties with government authorities in any port the ship visited until she tied up at Corfu, a Greek island in the Ionian Sea, in August 1968.

For the first few months of the ship's sojourn in port, all went well. The population was friendly and welcomed the estimated \$50,000 a month the Scientologists spent on supplies and personal purchases ashore.

During the first weeks of 1969, however, the Scientologists became aware that a covert campaign was being waged to discredit them and to plant suspicion against the church in the minds of the people and local government officials.

Upon investigation, they found that the primary source of the rumors was a British vice-consul named John Forte. According to church spokesmen who were aboard the Apollo at the time, Forte spread false and exaggerated reports con

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cerning Scientology, to the press, the Greek Security Police, the Greek Prime Minister's office and among influential members of Corfu society. (When Forte was later sacked from his job by the British Foreign Office, he attributed his termination to the Apollo affair.)

Forte's efforts alone would not have been sufficient to arouse much hostility in official quarters against the Scientologists. The American Embassy in Athens, however, supplied Greek authorities with derogatory information sent to them for the purpose from the U.S. Embassy in London.

The American consul in Athens, P.J. Peterson, reported to the Secretary of State in Washington that the Greek Foreign Ministry was to make a recommendation to the Greek Government on the church's application to remain on Corfu and to establish a Scientology academy there. Peterson asked the State Department to provide him with possible police or other derogatory records concerning L. Ron Hubbard.

Responding to the serious adverse reports from the Scientologists own government, as well as those from other sources, the Greek Government, on March 17 ordered the Apollo to leave Corfu within 24 hours.

The New York Times reported that "the expulsion order followed months of diplomatic pressure in Athens by U.S., British and Australian diplomats urging Greek authorities to examine the activities aboard the Apollo."

The ship was wholly unprepared to sail on such short notice. Having been in port for several months, she was not seaworthy. According to affidavits by the Apollo's engineer, officers and crew members, there were serious problems with the ship's engines and mechanical equipment, as well as dry rot in some of the lifeboats. To put to sea without making the necessary repairs, meant risking the lives of all on board.

Following the Corfu incident, the Greek Government conducted an independent investigation of the affair. Upon learning that they had been made a cat's paw in the covert action against the Church of Scientology, Greek interior Minister Stylianos Pattakos did the honourable thing and

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wrote Mr. Hubbard a note of apology. He invited the Scientologists to return to Greece.

The undercover lies and suspicions against the Scientologists, being spread abroad by U.S. agencies in collaboration with their counterparts in foreign countries, followed the Apollo like a school of hungry sharks.

Within a fortnight after the ship had gone into drydock in Casablanca in September 1969, documents reveal that the U. S. consul in that Moroccan port was circulating false reports about the ship and the church. Copies of a State Department Airgram A-30, dated September 26, 1969, containing derogatory data regarding Scientology, were sent to Rabat and Tangier (as well as Hamburg, London and Panama.)

Later, while the Apollo was in the Moroccan port of Safi, one of her passengers - a young woman named Susan Meister committed suicide. Under the guise of investigating this unfortunate incident, U.S. Vice-consul Jack Galbraith allegedly made threats against the ship and its crew.

According to affidavits sworn to by the Apollo's port captain, Peter Warren, and the ship's hostess, Jone Chiriasi, the vice consul said that if he wanted to do so, he could get the ship sunk at her berth in Safi by the CIA.

"That the CIA could easily sabotage the ship Apollo by getting a couple of bottles of Coca-Cola into the oil, or even better, commercial diamond dust, with the result that her engines would fail after some time at sea."

Warren also averred that Galbraith had told him "that Nixon once did order the CIA to sink a ship in Libya though there was no real reason other than that the ship was causing too many questions and too much trouble to the USA, whose position in Libya was bad."

The port captain's statement also asserted that the American vice-consul said he had heard it speculated that the ship was concerned in prostitution, drug traffic, espionage or

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counter espionage. He added that it had been further speculated that the Apollo was part of a pornography organization and was linking Denmark and Los Angeles for the purpose of distributing pornography. He said a report to that effect existed in a file on the ship maintained in the Consulate General in Casablanca.

As the officially launched "sibs" (whispered bits of gossip and false rumors) took effect, relations between the church and the Moroccan government began to deteriorate. Finally, in December 1972, the Tangiers police asked the Apollo to leave Moroccan waters.

Ironically, the ugly rumor which proved the most damaging to the Scientologists, not only in Morocco but in every foreign port they entered thereafter, was a grapevine report that the Apollo was secretly in the service of the CIA.

For almost two years prior to the Apollo's Greek and Moroccan troubles and the introduction of the CIA fable, the ship had sailed along Iberian coasts without encountering any difficulties with Spanish authorities.

In December 1969, however, government officials in Madrid issued an order restricting to eight days the vessel's stay in any Spanish port. The Sub-secretary of the Ministry of Merchant Marine revealed to two members of the ship's crew that an official file now existed on the ship. He would not disclose the file's contents, but indicated that the information was unfavorable to the Scientologists.

It is a documented fact that twice during 1971, the FBI forwarded derogatory reports concerning the church to the office of the Legal Attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Madrid.

In April 1972, the U.S. State Department sent a memorandum to the same Embassy, containing various unsubstantiated rumors about the Apollo, including the speculation of possible drug use aboard the ship.

On November 19, 1972, a shipment of chocolates being sent via air freight by the church was detained and field tested by the Narcotics Squad of the Spanish Secret Police who said that

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they found indications of LSD. They arrested six Americans and two British subjects who were concerned with air freight to and from the Apollo and the various Scientology churches.

The Scientologists were taken to a police station; locked in filthy cells and badly treated.

Mike Douglas, one of the Americans being detained said that he was grilled in the presence of Weldon K. Curry, an agent of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency.

"Curry threatened me that I and my associates would be held in prison incommunicado. He said that we were now in Spain, not the continental United States."

Douglas reported that during the next two days, he was interrogated several times. "The interrogators tried to frighten me by falsely accusing me and my associates of trafficking in drugs.'!."

After being imprisoned four days, the eight were released. Full laboratory tests had shown that no LSD nor narcotic of any kind were in the chocolates. It had been a typical police-state pickup, engineered and supervised by a sworn officer of the U.S. Government.

Just a year later, two Scientology missionaries were given similar treatment at the Barajas airport in Madrid. Again, an American agent led the interrogation, in the foul-mouthed, third-degree style of a Chicago precinct back-room.

After being searched, harassed and repeatedly insulted by their countrymen during a five-hour detention, the youths were released without being charged with any offense.

The drug agency was well aware that the Scientologists were not engaged in use or traffic of narcotics. The DEA maintained a covert operative aboard the Apollo, who regularly reported on the activities of the ship, its personnel and passengers.

In May 1974, while the Apollo was berthed in the port of Cadiz, it became obvious that there was uneasiness concerning the ship in official quarters. The harbour master kept shifting the vessel from mooring to mooring.

A plausible explanation of this odd behaviour by the

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Spanish authorities was provided by Senior E. de la Cruz, editor of the local daily newspaper, Diario de Cadiz. He told crew members of the Apollo that during the ship's earlier visit to the port, the U.S. consul in Cadiz had hinted that the vessel was linked to the CIA.

Thereafter, the ship encountered official hostility in other Spanish harbours, and was denied entry to El Ferrol and Marin.

The Apollo - CIA canard finally surfaced in the Spanish press in August 1974. A few months later, the ship was banned from making a landfall anywhere in Spain.

The false rumor that the Apollo was a CIA ship spread around the Mediterranean area with the speed of sound. The Scientologists became about as popular in European ports as a skunk in a submarine.

In the Portuguese port of Setubal, the local populace, which had formerly welcomed the Apollo to their shores, now became so hostile and threatening that the ship was forced to abandon port.

On October 3, 1974, in the harbor of Funchal in the Portuguese island of Madeira, the Apollo was actually attacked by an angry mob of several hundred demonstrators who believed she was a CIA spy ship.

The enraged rioters stormed the wharf and tried to loosen the vessel from her moorings. They shoved cars and motorcycles belonging to the Apollo's crew off the dock, into the sea. They assaulted the vessel itself with stones and incendiary bombs, resulting in serious injuries to fifteen members of the ship's crew.

While the savage tumult was in progress, a contingent of the Portuguese army stood by and watched.

Clearly, the Mediterranean had become a dangerous and

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inhospitable area for the "mystery ship". In October, 1974, she set sail for the United States. Her intended destination was Charleston, South Carolina.

En route, however, she made a stopover at St. George's island, Bermuda. The press coverage of her sojourn there, where a rock band from the ship staged a concert in conjunction with the local Department of Youth and Sports, apparently attracted the attention of DEA agents Frank Church and John R. Panetta.

(It will be recalled that the latter was a member of the D.C. Police Department's Narcotics Squad who had spied on the church a decade earlier. In a memorandum in Panetta's own handwriting at that time, he reports that he had been accompanied by another Metropolitan detective named Virgil Hood, concerning whom he then comments: Vergil [sic] Hood was also agent-fired from squad - plain no good nigger - stole \$100." This blatant racial slur apparently did not adversely affect Panetta's employment as an agent of the Drug Enforcement Agency.)

Agents Church and Panetta are believed to have placed a covert informant aboard the Apollo in Bermuda, to monitor the activities of everyone of the ship's company and to report on the vessel's future movements.

Informed by their spy aboard the Apollo that the ship's next port of call would be Charleston on October 30, 1974, the Justice Department alerted officials from various federal agencies to prepare a welcoming party to meet the vessel when she came in. They included agents from the Immigration Office, DEA, U.S. Customs, Coast Guard, and U.S. Marshals. The Charleston News -Courier of November 1, 1974 described the scene this way:

"There were enough U.S. Customs Service agents in Charleston Wednesday to keep each of the crew members of the vessel Apollo under surveillance for possible drug smuggling, according to an official source.

"The customs agents had gathered here from as far away as California to keep watch on the Apollo which was suspected of

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carrying large quantities of narcotics."

The drug smuggling charge made by the "official source" was typical of the kind of libel federal agencies have always found it easy to plant with a gullible and sensation-seeking press.

The principal objective of the federal team was to serve a subpoena on L. Ron Hubbard. The subpoena related to the church's civil tax case against the Government in Honolulu. The idea was for the Justice Department lawyers to interrogate Hubbard in a discovery process. It is quite possible also that the agents were prepared, under some legal technicality, to take Hubbard into custody.

The Government's eager reception committee and the waterfront spectators who had gathered on the docks to witness the apprehension of the "drug smugglers", were doomed to disappointment.

The Apollo did appear off Charleston that morning, about 15 miles past the sea buoy. But when she was a little more than five miles from shore, she came about and sailed dead away from Charleston harbour. A report from the ship's radio said she was on course to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where parts needed for repairs would be available.

Who had tipped off the Apollo just in the nick of time?

That was what Special Agent Patrick O'Brien, the enraged supremo of the Government operation, was determined to find out. He assigned Special Agent Billy D. Tennyson, also of the Customs Service to conduct an investigation. From the long report made of that probe, it appears that a U.S. marshal in Honolulu goofed. He prematurely served the church attorney in Hawaii with a subpoena concerned with the proposed taking of Mr. Hubbard's deposition. The lawyer queried the Apollo just in time for the vessel to turn away and avoid the unpleasant circumstances awaiting her arrival in Charleston.

The good ship Apollo did not, as reported to her enemies, set her course for Halifax. Instead, she sailed directly to Freeport, in the Bahamas. During the next two months, the vessel plied between Freeport and Nassau without any un

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friendly moves on the part of the Bahamian government.



Early in 1975, however, when the Apollo visited Santo Domingo and Kingston, Jamaica enroute to the Dutch West Indies, crew members who went ashore found that the heartell CIA story was being bruited about in both ports.

It was not surprising, then, that when the Scientologists arrived in Curacao on February 27, the "shaft-alley wireless" had already spread the false report concerning the CIA "spy ship."

During March and April, the Apollo cruised among the island of the Antilles, encountering in each port the same whispered allegations concerning the covert purpose and CIA connection of the ship.

A U.S. Department of State memorandum noted that "the Apollo has shuttled between Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao like a circus train, carrying entertainers, musicians, theatre groups, etc., who also double as crew on deck, watch and kitchen duties. Groups from the Apollo have performed, without charge, up to three shows a day, in all sections of the islands."

Very suspicious - the kind of activity that, according to the U. S. Consul General, "has inspired speculation from the local business community and others concerning its [the Apollo's] real purpose for being in the N.A. [Netherlands Antilles] ... The secrecy, obvious liquidity and lack of visible support have spurred numerous rumors deducing Apollo as a CIA or Mafia cover, tax evasion scheme, currency manipulation center, etc."

To be sure, this list of suspicions sounds more like a concoction emanating from the U.S. Justice Department than from the Dutch business community, who couldn't care less about tax evasion and currency trading. Like their counterparts elsewhere, the Antilles merchants do not ask where their customers got their money - only whether they have enough cash to cover their purchases.

As for the CIA rouser, however, that was another order of cat. It left the island tradesmen poised uncomfortably bet-

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ween profit and patriotism.

The security forces, on the other hand, faced no such dilemma. The way was made straight for them by official information direct from the U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. In an Airgram to Curacao and to virtually every other U.S. embassy in the Carribean, as well as, significantly, the Hague in Holland, the Secretary offered an unfavourable report about the church and the ship.

Soon after the Apollo's return to Trinidad, her captain was informed in a letter from the Minister of Legal Affairs in Barbados that no person from or in any way connected with the ship would forthwith be allowed into Barbados.

The following day, the Chief of Immigration in Trinidad ordered the vessel to leave Trinidad, an action which the U. S. embassy reported with satisfaction to the State Department in Washington.

There was still Curacao, the only remaining haven in the Caribbean still open to the Apollo. But not for long. Upon their arrival in Willemstad, the slandered voyagers learned that "someone from Interpol" had paid a visit to the newspaper, the local chief of immigration, and others, providing them with a report from far-off Australia, denouncing Scientology as evil, and its adherents "sadly deluded and often mentally ill."

That was all bad enough; but to be evil, sadly deluded, mentally ill and CIA operatives, was just too much.

Prime Minister Evertz demanded that the "ship of fools" be sent away from the sane and orderly shores of Curacao.

At about the same time, the government of Jamaica withdrew its permission for the Apollo to make a landfall anywhere around that paradise of rum, Calypso and infiltrating Cuban Communists.

There was nowhere left to go, except home. So the ship which had never delivered a cargo to any port more dangerous than music, fun and scores of young people with cameras and money, set sail once more for the Bahamas, and thence to Clearwater, Florida where crew and shipmates went ashore to

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establish a land base for their Scientology movement.

In all the long and tragic history of the sea, it is unlikely that any ship or group of seafarers were ever banned from so many lands in so short a space of time.

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